

# INDEX: THE AMERICAN ORGANIST VOLUME 42, JANUARY–DECEMBER 2008

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## THE DEAN'S CHATTERVOX . . . TOUGH CHOICES IN TOUGH TIMES

Deborah Gemma

In many churches and institutions, the last quarter of the year is the time for budget preparation. In these tough economic times, many non-profits face dwindling funds and hard choices. How do we keep our programs and our positions healthy in this environment?

When it comes to dealing with dollars, we have two paths to pursue: increase revenue and cut expenses. Perhaps we can think of some creative ways to supplement our operating budget funds: present a benefit concert or sell a piano that is never used. I know of a church where Christmas and Easter memorial gifts can be given not only for flowers but for the hiring of instrumentalists. Cutting expenses may be inevitable. We can dig deeper in our current choral libraries or swap anthems with a colleague instead of purchasing new music. There may be hidden gems in an anthology or out-of-the-way file cabinet that we haven't looked at in a while. One of our local organ technicians has given practical tips about cutting the expense of organ maintenance and tuning, such as tuning in warmer months, which require less heat, or doing partial tunings, as is often done in

Europe. Maybe an organist will hire a single trumpet player instead of a brass quintet, or perhaps, the church will choose to have a spoken worship service when its musician is on vacation.

Even more important than dealing with dollars is maintaining a healthy vision and perspective of our ministries and missions during hard times. It is crucial that we can articulate what our work is and why it is important. The more clearly we communicate to others how our work as musicians furthers the mission of our church or institution, the less likely our work will be viewed as a luxury that can be cut. We need to stay in touch with the economic reality of our situation: if the church has a leaky roof and no money for fuel, don't insist that purchasing a harpsichord is essential in your budget! Economic duress cannot become an excuse for unethical behavior. Borrowing music is thrifty; photocopying it is illegal. Choosing to do without the services of extra musicians is an unfortunate but legitimate sacrifice; expecting an incumbent musician to increase duties and lower compensation without renegotiating is unfair.

We would be wise to engage in periodic self-examination. It is a sad but true situation that sometimes financial constraints are used as an excuse to cut or eliminate positions to avoid dealing with other underlying conflict or stress. Dust off your contract and see if it is still up to date, and if you are meeting all expectations. Are you still as cheerful, prompt, and willing to consider new ways of collaborating in your job as you were when you were new to the position? Are you involved in any conflict? If we have been honest with ourselves and renewed our commitment to doing our best work, we can stand resolute in expecting to be treated fairly and professionally.

The economy may hamper our ability to do "business as usual," but with common sense and thoughtfulness we can hope to minimize its impact. The economy can never take away our talents, our joy in music, or our ability to share that gift with others.

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